HORROR

AN ENTERTAINING COMIC

NO. 26
AUG-SEPT.

THE VAULT OF HORROR®

AN ENTERTAINING COMIC

REPRINT EDITION

FEATURING...

THE VAULT-KEEPER

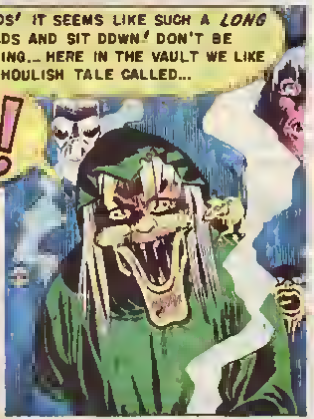
THE OLD WITCH

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! WELCOME ONCE AGAIN TO THE *VAULT OF HORROR*, MY FIENDS! IT SEEMS LIKE SUCH A *LONG* TIME SINCE WE LAST MET, SO JUST PULL UP A PILE OF SHRUNKEN HEADS AND SIT DOWN! DON'T BE ALARMED ABOUT ALL THE *GHOSTS* YOU SEE FLOATING NEAR THE CEILING... HERE IN THE VAULT WE LIKE TO KEEP OUR *SPIRITS UP!* HEH, HEH, HEH! NOW LET'S BEGIN OUR GHOULISH TALE CALLED...

TWO OF A KIND!



PIER 30... THE HUGE OCEAN LINER SAT SILENTLY IN THE FOGGY DARKNESS OF THE WATERFRONT, SOLEMNLY OVERLOOKING A GROUP OF NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPHERS HUDDLED IN THE SHADOWS OF THE PIER...

CONFOUND IT! SHE CAN'T STAY ABOARD FOREVER! IT'S TEN P.M. NOW!

WE'VE BEEN WAITING ALL DAY, I GUESS WE CAN WAIT A BIT MORE!

THE NEWSMEN WERE PATIENTLY WAITING FOR WILLOW DREE, THE FAMOUS, CAMERA-SHY STAGE ACTRESS...

STRANGE THAT SHE TURNED DOWN SO MANY HOLLYWOOD OFFERS!

NOT SO STRANGE... THEY USE *CAMERAS* IN HOLLYWOOD!

YES, WILLOW DREE WAS *POISON* TO PHOTOGRAPHERS! TOO MANY OF THEM HAD HAD THEIR CAMERAS SMASHED FOR ATTEMPTING TO TAKE HER PICTURE!

THERE ISN'T A *SINGLE PHOTO* OF HER IN EXISTENCE! THE GUY THAT *DOES* GET HER PICTURE IS IN FOR A *NICE BONUS!*

YEAH! I GUESS AL BOLTON OF THE COURIER CAME CLOSEST! REMEMBER?

AL BOLTON HAD SWORN TO GET A PICTURE OF WILLOW DREE, AND AFTER TRAILING HER FOR DAYS, FINALLY CLICKED THE SHUTTER...

AH!

TRIUMPHANTLY, HE HAD RETURNED TO HIS EDITOR, BUT WHEN THE NEGATIVES WERE DEVELOPED...

YOU BRAINLESS IDIOT! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE KIDDING? YOU GOT A PICTURE OF HER SUMMER HOME... BUT THAT'S ALL!

HUH??

YEAH, I REMEMBER! POOR AL WASN'T THE SAME AFTER THAT! HE GAVE UP PHOTOGRAPHY, DIDN'T HE?

SURE DID! SAY! HERE COMES BYRON OF THE NEWS!

ANYTHING NEW ON WHEN WILLOW DREE IS GOING TO LEAVE THE SHIP?

I JUST TALKED TO THE SHIP'S PURSER! SHE'S PUT ONE OVER ON US AGAIN! SHE DEBARKED ABOUT THREE HOURS AGO... CLIMBED DOWN A ROPE LADDER INTO A SMALL BOAT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SHIP!

THE NEWSMEN HAD 'MISSED THE BOAT' ALL RIGHT! FOR WHILE THEY FUMED AND GROWLED OVER THEIR MISFORTUNE, WILLOW DREE WAS COMFORTABLY RELAXING IN HER PENTHOUSE! THE APARTMENT, THOUGH LUXURIOUS, WAS CONSPICUOUS BY ITS TOTAL *ABSENCE OF MIRRORS!*

A FEW NIGHTS LATER, SEVERAL MEN CALLED ON WILLOW...
I'VE READ THE PLAY, GENTLEMEN, AND I'M WILLING TO ACCEPT THE LEADING ROLE UNDER MY USUAL TERMS!
OH, NO! YOU MEAN...
EXACTLY! THERE ARE TO BE NO MATINEE PERFORMANCES! ONE SHOW A DAY...AND THAT WILL BE IN THE EVENING!
(SIGH!) AND I GUESS YOU WANT TO REHEARSE ONLY IN THE EVENING, AS USUAL?
YES! OTHERWISE, I WILL NOT TAKE THE ROLE! IS IT AGREED?
(SIGH!) AGREED!
THAT, AND HER RELUCTANCE TO BE PUBLICIZED, WAS WHY COLUMNISTS AND SHOW PEOPLE CALLED HER TEMPERMENTAL! SOME EVENINGS LATER SHE WAS INTRODUCED TO HER CO-STAR, BRADBURY PHILLIPS...
I'VE BEEN WANTING TO MEET YOU FOR A GREAT MANY YEARS, MISS DREE!
PLEASE CALL ME 'WILLOW'! I'M HAPPY TO MEET YOU TOO...BRAD! I THINK WE'LL BE GOOD FRIENDS!
IN THE WEEKS OF REHEARSALS THAT FOLLOWED, BRAD AND WILLOW BECAME MORE THAN GOOD FRIENDS.
I'VE NEVER PLAYED OPPOSITE A LOVELIER WOMAN THAN YOU, WILLOW! WILL YOU HAVE DINNER WITH ME TONIGHT?
OH, BRAD, I'D LOVE TO... BUT AT MY APARTMENT!
WHEN THEY BEGAN SEEING EACH OTHER STEADILY, THE THEATRE AND NEWSPAPER WORLDS WERE HOPEFUL THAT AT LAST PERHAPS THERE WOULD BE A CHANGE IN HER ..
MAYBE SHE'LL BREAK DOWN AND LET HER PICTURE BE TAKEN!
IF THEY GET MARRIED, MAYBE SHE'LL BE A LITTLE MORE COOPERATIVE!
WILLOW, THE SHOW'S ALL SET TO OPEN NEXT WEEK, AND WE'VE BEEN WORKING HARD! LET'S TAKE THE WEEKEND OFF AND GO SOMEWHERE TOGETHER!
OH, BRAD! HOW WONDERFUL! I'VE BEEN DYING TO TAKE A REST!
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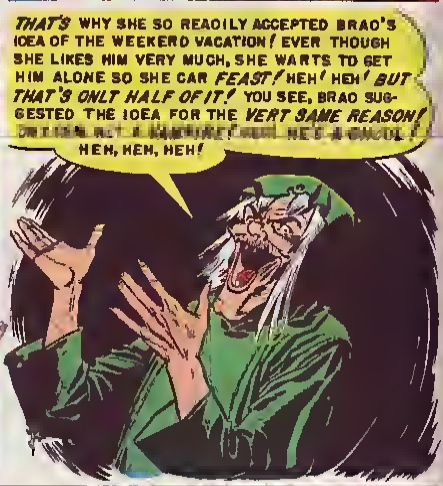
I KROW A GOOD WIRTER RESORT JUST A FEW HOURS ORIVE FROM HERE! I OAR PICK YOU UP TOMORROW MORNIRG, AND...
NO, BRAD! PICK ME UP TOMORROW NIGHT! YOU FORGET I'M A NIGHT OWL WHO LIKES TO SLEEP ALL DAY!

OKAY, BEAUTIFUL! ARYTHIRG YOU SAY! I'VE BEEN WANTIRG TO BE ALORE WITH YOU, AWAY FROM PEOPLE, FOR A LONG TIME!
OH, BRAD..

HEH, HEH! SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF GOOEY MUSH, EH? WELL, DOR'T BE IMPATIERT! THE GOOD PART IS JUST BEGIRRIRG! EVERYORE THIRKS POOR WILLOW IS TEMPERMENTAL... BUT YOU ARO I KNOW THE REASOR WHY SHE REFUSES TO HAVE HER PICTURE TAKEN, HATES MIRRORS, ARO SLEEPS ALL


THAT'S WHY SHE SO READILY ACCEPTED BRAD'S IDEA OF THE WEEKERD VACATION! EVER THOUGH SHE LIKES HIM VERY MUCH, SHE WARTS TO GET HIM ALONE SO SHE CAR FEAST! HEH! HEH! BUT THAT'S ONLT HALF OF IT! YOU SEE, BRAD SUGGESTED THE IDEA FOR THE VERT SAME REASON!
HEH, HEH, HEH!

WELL, THE NEXT NIGHT, THE TWO FIENDS WERE AT THE SKI LODGE...
LOOK AT THAT MOON! ISN'T IT BEAUTIFUL?
YES! IT...IT DOES SOMETHING TO YOU, DOESN'T IT?

YES... IT DOES! SAY! THERE'S A SMALL CABIN AROUND THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN, UP NEAR THE TOP! IT'S QUITE A HIKE, BUT ONCE WE GET THERE, WE'D BE...COMPLETELY ALONE!
...I'D LIKE THAT...

A SHORT TIME LATER, TWO FIGURES SET OUT FROM THE SKI LODGE AND SLOWLY TRUDGED THROUGH THE DEEP, MOORLIT SROW UP ARO AROURD THE SIDE OF THE MOURTAIR...

IT WAS NO EASY JOURNEY! THEY PLODDED ON, STEP AFTER STEP... AND BRAD FOUND HIS THOUGHTS OF WILLOW GIVING HIM TROUBLE ...

I'M A HEEL TO WANT TO KILL *HER!* I COULD HAVE PICKED *ANOTHER* VICTIM! SHE'S SUCH A SWELL GIRL! I... I *LIKE* HER SO MUCH!

AND WILLOW? SHE WAS HAVING DIFFICULTIES WITH HER HEART, JUST AS BRAD WAS...

HE'S BEEN SO *WONDERFUL!* I DON'T KNOW WHATEVER MADE ME THINK I WANTED TO *KILL* HIM! I...I THINK I'M FALLING IN *LOVE* WITH HIM!

AND THEN, SUDDENLY, WITHOUT ANY WARNING, A RAGING, BLINDING SNOWSTORM SWOOPED DOWN ON THEM ...

WILLOW! HOLD MY HAND TIGHTLY! WE'VE GOT TO KEEP CLOSE TOGETHER!

BRAD! I'M FRIGHTENED!

FOR SEVERAL HOURS THEY STRUGGLED THROUGH THE BLIZZARD, STUMBLING AND FALLING AGAIN AND AGAIN IN THE DEEP BANKS OF SNOW... TRYING DESPERATELY TO REACH THE CABIN AND SAFETY...

(GASP!) THERE, WILLOW! *THERE'S THE CABIN!* I CAN...(GASP!) I CAN SEE IT!

ANOTHER HALF HOUR PASSED BEFORE THEY FINALLY ENTERED THE CABIN AND THREW THEMSELVES ON THE BUNKS...EXHAUSTED! IT WAS ALMOST DAWN...

THEY SLEPT SOUNDLY UNTIL EARLY EVENING! WILLOW AWOKE TO FIND BRAD BENDING OVER HER, AN ANXIOUS EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE...

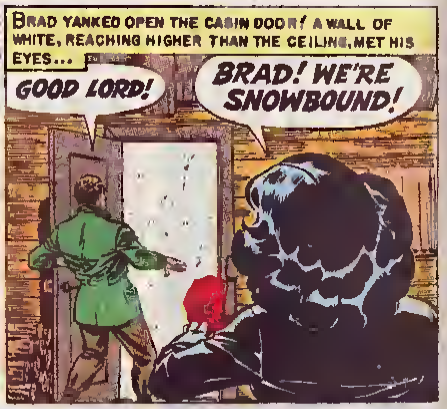
BRAD! OH... FOR A MOMENT YOU STARTLED ME!

I.. I COULDN'T HEAR YOU BREATHING! *YOU..YOU LOOKED DEAD!* BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT! I... I WAS SO *WORRIED* ..

BRAD...

DARLING...

BRAD... THE STORM! HAS IT STOPPED YET?
I DON'T THINK SO, WILLOW! DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT! I'LL OPEN THE DOOR AND..


BRAD YANKED OPEN THE CABIN DOOR! A WALL OF WHITE, REACHING HIGHER THAN THE CEILING, MET HIS EYES...
GOOD LORD!
BRAD! WE'RE SNOWBOUND!

THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT WAIT... AND HOPE THAT SOMEONE WOULD REALIZE WHERE THEY WERE AND FORM A RESCUE PARTY...
YOU SLEEP HERE, WILLOW! IT'S WARMER! I'LL SLEEP IN THE NEXT ROOM!
ALL RIGHT, BRAD!

THE NIGHTS PASSED...
LORD, I'M HUNGRY! I'M GETTING STOMACH CRAMPS! BUT I WON'T TOUCH WILLOW! I'D DIE, RATHER THAN HARM HER!

... AND ANOTHER NIGHT PASSED...
I'D GIVE ANYTHING FOR SOMEONE'S BLOOD RIGHT NOW! MY BODY CRAVES IT SO MUCH! IF ONLY SOMEONE ELSE WERE WITH ME INSTEAD OF BRAD! I'LL NEVER HURT HIM!

... AND ANOTHER NIGHT...
I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! IF ONLY IT WOULD STOP SNOWING!

THEY'VE GOT TO RESCUE US SOON! I...I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS! (PANT!) WHY...WHY DON'T THEY COME DIG US OUT?

BUT THE FOLLOWING EVENING...
BRAD...I'M...I'M TOO WEAK TO STAND! I ..WHAT..WHAT HAPPENED...YOUR ARM?
I HAD A LITTLE ACCIDENT! FELL DOWN! JUST...JUST A SPRAIN! DON'T WORRY,HONEY!
BUT YOU, WILLOW! YOU LOOK SO PALE! YOU'D BETTER STAY IN BED!
YOU...YOU'RE RIGHT! I DO FEEL WEAK! PERHAPS I SHOULD BE IN BED!
I'LL BE IN THE NEXT ROOM, KITTEN! JUST CALL IF YOU WANT ME! I...I LOVE YOU, WILLOW..
LOVE... YOU, BRAD!
BRAD RETURNED TO HIS ROOM AND SLUMPED ON THE EDGE OF HIS BED, TRYING DESPERATELY TO SUPPRESS THE OVERWHELMING URGE THAT WAS CONSUMING HIM!
THE NEXT NIGHT BRAD AWOKE FROM HIS SLEEP AND HURRIED TO WILLOW'S SIDE...
WILLOW...WILLOW, ARE YOU AWAKE?
WILLOW STARED WEAKLY UP AT HIM...
BRAD...YOU...(GASP!) YOU'RE HURT! GOOD LORD WHAT...(GASP!) WHAT HAPPENED?
BRAD LOOKED AWAY, TRYING TO AVOID HER QUESTIONING EYES...
OH...ER...NOTHING, HONEY! DON'T WORRY! IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO MAKE YOU COMFORTABLE?
N-NO, BRAD! I'LL... BE ALL RIGHT!
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A WEEK PASSED! WILLOW REMAINED IN HER BED, GROWING STEADILY PALER AND WEAKER! THEN, THE TONS OF SNOW LYING ON THE ROOF PROVED TOO MUCH OF A STRAIN ON THE SMALL CABIN'S STRUCTURE...

CR-RUNCH!

WITH AN EAR SPLITTING CRACK, THE ROOF SPLINTERED AND COLLAPSED DIRECTLY ABOVE WILLOW! A HUGE, STAKE-LIKE FRAGMENT HURTLED DOWN...

HEARING THE THUNDEROUS ROAR AND WILLOW'S PETRIFIED SCREAM OF AGONY FROM THE NEXT ROOM, BRAD LUNGED FROM HIS BED AND DRAGGED HIMSELF TO HER BEDSIDE...

WILLOW!

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, A RESCUE PARTY ARRIVED AND REMOVED THE DRIFTS OF SNOW FROM THE DOOR! THEY STEPPED INSIDE...

THERE THEY ARE!

GOOD LORD!

THE RESCUERS STARED IN HORRIFIED FASCINATION AT THE GRUESOME SIGHT THEIR EYES BEHELD! THE WOMAN LAY IN HER BED, A WOODEN STAKE PROTRUDING UPRIGHT FROM HER CHEST; HER FLESH AS DEATHLY WHITE AS THE SNOW SURROUNDING HER. THE MAN, OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIM, WAS SPRAWLED GROTESQUELY ON THE FLOOR, HIS HAND GRASPING HERS IN A DEATH-GRIP! FOR IN ORDER TO *SPARE* EACH OTHER, *WILLOW HAD DRAINED HER OWN BLOOD... AND BRAD HAD EATEN MOST OF HIS OWN FLESH...*

THE END

HEH, HEH! WASN'T THAT A PATHETIC LOVE AFFAIR? WILLOW WAS A *SUCKER* FOR BRAD... AND BRAD *ATE HIMSELF UP ALIVE* OVER WILLOW! A REALLY *SELF-SACRIFICING* COUPLE, WOULDN'T YOU SAY? YOU KNOW THAT OLD EXPRESSION... "THE CORPSE OF TRUE LOVE..." HEH, HEH! WELL, NOW IT'S TIME TO GO ON TO THAT SICKENING *CRYPT-KEEPER!* DON'T BE *TOO* BORED... *I'LL* SEE YOU LATER IN THE BOOK!

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

THANK YOU, V K., FON EIGHT PAGES OF *SHEER...STARK...NOTHING!* IF *THAT'S* A *NORROR STORY*, I'LL *EAT MY COFFIN!* WHY, I'LL BET *YOU COULDN'T MAKE* A *NUDE NATIVE* OF *NEW GUINEA SHIVER* AT THE *NORTH POLE* WITH THAT YAHN! NEN, HEH! YEP! IT'S *ME*, FIENDS! *THE CRYPT-KEEPER*... NEADY TO *REALLY* COME ACNOSS WITH THE *DURDLES!* SO *CREEP* INTO THE *CRYPT, GRAB* YOUR *GHOUL*, AN' *LET'S DANCE!* DON'T *MATTER* IF YOU DON'T *FEEL* LIKE IT! I'LL *KEEP YOU NOPPIN'* WITH THE *TERROR-TALE* I CALL...

GRAFT IN CONCRETE!

GODFREY NONNSBY, PNESIDENT OF THE NONNSBY CONSTNUCTION COMPANY AND MEMBER OF THE TOWN COUNCIL, PUFFED NERVOUSLY ON NIS CIGAR AS NE PACED THE FLOOR OF THE LIBNARY IN MAYON JOHN APPLEGATE'S LUXURIOUS MANSION! FINALLY TNE DOOR OF THE LIBNARY OPENED AND THE MAYON APPEARED...

WELL, NONNSBY! I'M SORNY I KEPT YOU *WAITING*, BUT I'M GIVING A DINNER PANTY! WHAT CAR BE *SO IMPORTANT* THAT WOULDN'T *WAIT* FON THE *COUNCIL MEETING* TOMORROW MONNING?

I'LL BE AS BRIEF AS I *CAN*, MAYOR APPLEGATE! IT'S *ABOUT* TOMORNOW'S MEETING THAT I'VE COME...

YOU MEAN THE ROAD CONTRACT, DON'T YOU, HORNSBY?
EXACTLY, MAYOR! I WANT THAT CONTRACT!
IT'S NOT UP TO ME, HORNSBY! THE VOTE OF THE COUNCIL WILL DECIDE WHO GETS THE JOB!
YOU CAN SWING IT IF YOU WANT TO, MAYOR!
I MIGHT! BUT I'M NOT GOING TO! I KNOW YOUR PLAN! YOU WANT THE ROAD TO RUN THROUGH THAT PARCEL OF LAND YOU OWN SOUTH OF TOWN!
AND I WANT MY CONSTRUCTION COMPANY TO GET THE CONTRACT, TOO!
I'M SORRY, HORNSBY! I WILL NOT BE A PART OF ANY DIRTY DEALS INVOLVING THE TOWN'S MONEY!
I THINK YOU WILL, MAYOR! AFTER ALL! THIS IS NOTHING NEW TO YOU!
YOU'D BETTER EXPLAIN YOURSELF, HORNSBY! I DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU'RE INFERRING!
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE NEW SCHOOL THEY'RE PUTTING UP, APPLEGATE! I KNOW ALL ABOUT THE KICKBACK YOU'RE GETTING ON THE PRICE THE TOWN PAID FOR THE LAND!
WHAT IN BLAZES ARE YOU TALKING ASOUT, HORNSBY!
I'M TALKING ABOUT THIS AGREEMENT! HERE'S A PHOTOSTATIC COPY! LOOK FAMILIAR, MAYOR? WHAT IF THE REST OF THE COUNCIL SAW THIS?
THIS... THIS IS BLACK-MAIL, HORNSBY!
COME NOW, MAYOR APPLEGATE! LET'S JUST SAY THAT WE'VE COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING! TOMORROW, AT THE COUNCIL MEETING, YOU'LL SEE THAT I GET THE ROAD CONTRACT... AND OVER MY PROPOSED ROUTE... EH?

HEH, HEH! WELL, KIDDIES! IT'S JUST LIKE THET SAY! 'ALL'S FAIR ...IN LOVE AND POLITICS!' SO GOOFREY NORNSBT LAID NIS CARDS ON THE TABLE AND NATOR APPLEGATE COULON'T TOP 'EM! TNE NEXT DAT, AT THE COUNCIL MEETING...
NOW, JUST ONE MINUTE, MAYOR APPLEGATE! IF, AS YOU SAY, WE DO GRANT THIS CONTRACT TO OUR FELLOW COUNCIL MEMBER, MR. HORNSBY, AM I TO UNDERSTAND THAT TNE ROAD WILL TNEN FOLLOW HIS PROPOSED ROUTE?
TNE CONTRACT WOULD MEAN THAT, MR. WILLIAMS!
BUT ISN'T IT RATHER OBVIDUS THAT THE ROUTE IS LAID OUT SO AS TO INCLUDE NIS OWN PROPERTY HOLDINGS?
MR. WILLIAMS! I SEEM TO RECALL A SIMILAR SITUATION LAST YEAR... WHEN THE COUNCIL WAS VOTING ON A NEW PLAYGROUND FOR THE PARK.
LOOK NERE, MATOR APPLEGATE! I DON'T SEE NOW THAT NAS ANT BEARING ON TNE PRESENT CASE!
PERNAPS TNE REST OF THE COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO NEAR WNERE THE EQUIPMENT FOR THE PLAYGROUND CAME FROM, MR. WILLIAMS?
ANEM... COUGH! I... ER... SEE NOW THAT TNE ROUTE IS TNE BEST... AND TNAT IT IS ONLY BY SHEER COINCIDENCE THAT IT PASSES MR HORNSBY'S PROPERTY! I'LL CAST MY VOTE... AYE!
THANK YOU, MR. WILLIAMS! ANY OTHER OBJECTIONS?
WHAT ABOUT THE CEMETERY, NORNSBY? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT TNAT?
CEMETERY? CEMETERY? WNAT CEMETERY, MR. BARLOW?
WNY CRAGMDOR CEMETERY, MR. NORNSBY! THE ONE I AM TNE PRESIDENT OF! YOUR ROUTE WILL HAVE TO PASS THROUGN IT!
NORNSBY! YOU DIDN'T MENTION THIS!
MY ROUTE DOES N'T PASS TNROUGN CRAGMDOR MR. BARLOW!
IT DOES NOW, HORNSBY! HEH, HEH! THAT IS... IF YOU WANT ME TO VOTE 'AYE'!
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BODIES, BARLOW?
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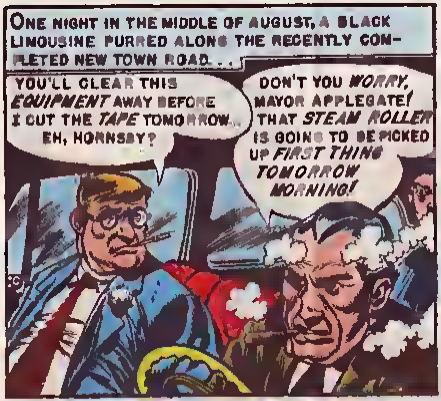
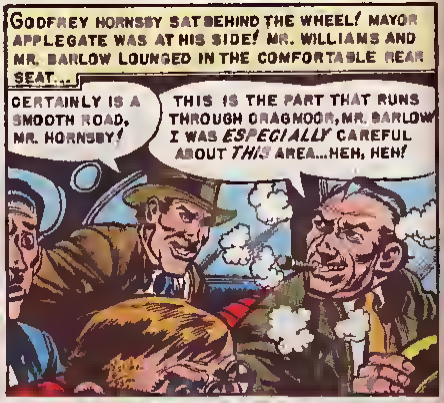
WE'LL MOVE THEM, MAYOR APPLEGATE!
THIS IS A HOLD-UP, BARLOW!
EXACTLY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT HORNSBY HAS ON YOU, MAYOR, BUT AS FOR ME... IF YOU WANT MY VOTE...THE ROAD GOES THROUGH CRAGMOOR!
HE'S GOT US, HORNSBY!
ALL RIGHT, BARLOW! YOU WIN! IT'S A DEAL! THE ROUTE HITS CRAGMOOR!
ALL IN FAVOR OF ACCEPTING HORNSBY CONSTRUCTION COMPANY'S BID FOR THE PROPOSED TOWN ROAD, SIGNIFY BY SAYING 'AYE'!
AYE! AYE! AYE!
HEH, HEH! AND SO THESE HONEST, CONSCIENTIOUS SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE AWARDED GODFREY HORNSBY THE ROAD CONTRACT! SOON...CONSTRUCTION BEGAN...
WHY, HELLO, MR. BARLOW! COME DOWN TO SEE HOW WE'RE DOING?
YEP! LOOKS GOOD, HORNSBY! YOU'LL BE REACHING CRAGMOOR SOON, EH?
NEXT WEEK, MR. BARLOW! GOT THOSE GRAVES RELOCATED?
THAT'S WHAT I CAME TO SEE YOU ABOUT, HORNSBY! WHERE CAN WE TALK... IN PRIVATE?
HORNSBY LEO BARLOW TO THE CONSTRUCTION SHACK! HE CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND THEM...
OKAY, BARLOW! WHAT'S THE PITCH?
HOW DEEP IS THE ROAD-BED, MR. HORNSBY? I MEAN — HOW FAR DOWN DO YOU DIG?
IT'S NOT SIX FEET, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE DRIVING AT, BARLOW!
THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT I'M DRIVING AT, HORNSBY! NOW...I HAVE A PROPOSITION FOR YOU! OF COURSE — THIS WILL JUST BE BETWEEN YOU AND ME! NOW, WHEN THE ROAD...

HEH, HEH! YES, YOU CLEVER LITTLE FIENDS! MR. BARLOW'S SCHEME IS JUST THAT! WHY GO TO THE TROUBLE OF DIGGING UP THIRTY-TWO GRAVES AND TRANSFERING THE COFFINS TO A DIFFERENT PART OF CRAGMOOR CEMETERY, WHEN SO MUCH MONEY COULD BE SAVED BY JUST RELOCATING THE MONUMENTS! AFTER ALL! WHO'S GONNA KNOW? THE CORPSES? HEH... HEH..
ALL RIGHT, BARLOW! THAT'S A DEAL! BUT YOU'D BETTER MAKE THAT FIVE HUNORED!
FIVE HUNDRED IS PRETTY STEEP, HORNSBY!
ONE OF MY BULL-DOZERS COULD SLIP... BARLOW!
OKAY! OKAY! FIVE HUNDRED!
AND SO, THE TOWN ROAD NEARED COMPLETION! IT WOUND THROUGH CRAGMOOR CEMETERY AND ON THROUGH HORNSBY'S OWN PROPERTY! ONE NIGHT...
MR. WILLIAMS! AND TO WHAT DO I OWE THE HONOR OF THIS VISIT?
FORGET THE SLUSH, HORNSBY! I'M HERE FOR MY CUT OF THIS PIE! EITHER THAT... OR I TALK!
YOU'RE FORGETTING MAYOR APPLEGATE'S INFORMATION ON THAT PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT CONTRACT, AREN'T YOU, WILLIAMS?
I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES, HORNSBY! IF I GO DOWN, I'LL DRAG YOU WITH ME!
SO THAT'S HOW YOU FEEL, EH?
THAT'S HOW I FEEL, HORNSBY! SHALL WE MAKE IT... SAY... TWO THOUSAND?
ALL RIGHT, WILLIAMS! TWO THOUSAND! BUT NOT ONE CENT MORE!
I KNEW WE'D SEE THINGS EYE TO EYE, MR. HORNSBY! HERE'S MY PEN...
5

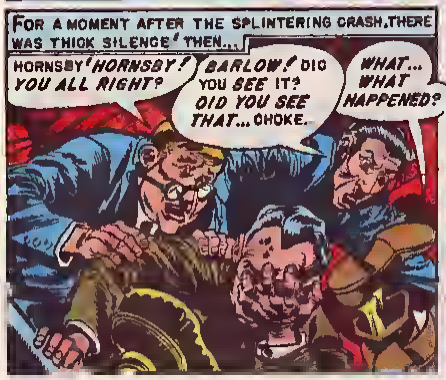

ONE NIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF AUGUST, A BLACK LIMOUSINE PURRED ALONG THE RECENTLY COMPLETED NEW TOWN ROAD...
YOU'LL CLEAR THIS EQUIPMENT AWAY BEFORE I CUT THE TAPE TOMORROW... EH, HORNSBY?
DON'T YOU WORRY, MAYOR APPLEGATE! THAT STEAM ROLLER IS GOING TO BE PICKED UP FIRST THING TOMORROW MORNING!

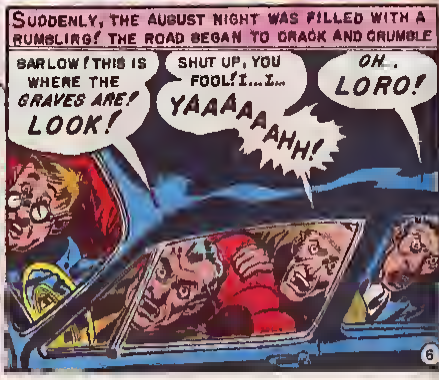

GODFREY HORNSBY SAT BEHIND THE WHEEL! MAYOR APPLEGATE WAS AT HIS SIDE! MR. WILLIAMS AND MR. BARLOW LOUNGED IN THE COMFORTABLE REAR SEAT...
CERTAINLY IS A SMOOTH ROAD, MR. HORNSBY!
THIS IS THE PART THAT RUNS THROUGH DRAGMOOR, MR. BARLOW! I WAS ESPECIALLY CAREFUL ABOUT THIS AREA... HEH, HEH!

SUDDENLY THE CAR'S HEADLIGHTS FELL UPON SOMETHING IN THE ROAD AHEAD...
GOOD LORD!
LOOK OUT, HORNSBY!

IT STUCK UP OUT OF THE NEW BLACK TAR, CLAWING AT THE HOT NIGHT AIR... A ROTTED, MOULDY, MAGGOT-COVERED HAND...
SCEEEEEE

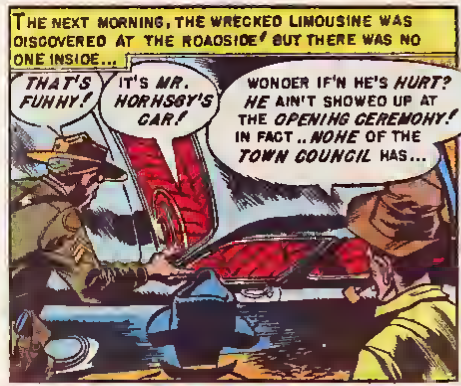
THE BLACK LIMOUSINE SWERVED CRAZILY TO AVOID HITTING THE SLIMY THING... CAREENED ACROSS THE ROAD... ARG
KABLANG!

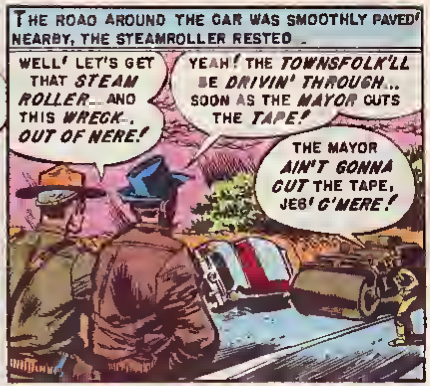

FOR A MOMENT AFTER THE SPLINTERING CRASH, THERE WAS THICK SILENCE! THEN...
HORNSBY! HORNSBY! YOU ALL RIGHT?
BARLOW! DID YOU SEE IT? DID YOU SEE THAT... CHOKE...
WHAT... WHAT HAPPENED?


SUDDENLY, THE AUGUST NIGHT WAS FILLED WITH A RUMBLING! THE ROAD BEGAN TO CRACK AND CRUMBLE
BARLOW! THIS IS WHERE THE GRAVES ARE! LOOK!
SHUT UP, YOU FOOL! I... I...
YAAAAAAAHH!
OH, LORD!

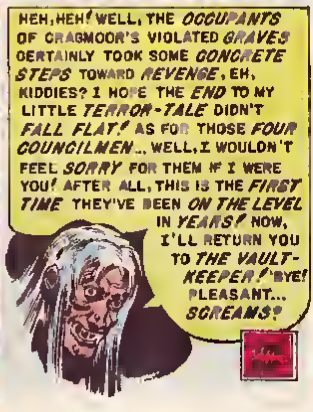
SLOWLY, THEY BEGAN TO EMERGE FROM BENEATH THE NEWLY COMPLETED HIGHWAY! THEY TOTTERED AND STUMBLED... MOVING AWKWARDLY...
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
I CAN'T OPEN THE DOOR! IT'S JAMMED!

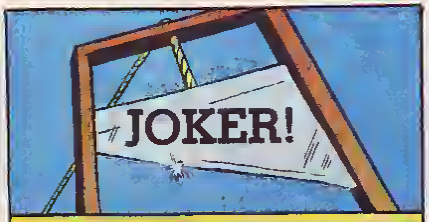
THE PUTRID ODOR OF THIRTY-TWO DECAYING CORPSES BURNED THE TRAPPED COUNCILMEN'S NOSTRILS ...
OH, LORD! HELP US!
WE'RE TRAPPED! AND THEY'RE COMING...
EEEEEAAAA!


THE NEXT MORNING, THE WRECKED LIMOUSINE WAS DISCOVERED AT THE ROADSIDE! BUT THERE WAS NO ONE INSIDE...
THAT'S FUNNY!
IT'S MR. HORNSBY'S CAR!
WONDER IF'N HE'S HURT? HE AIN'T SHOWED UP AT THE OPENING CEREMONY! IN FACT.. NONE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL HAS...


THE ROAD AROUND THE CAR WAS SMOOTHLY PAVED! NEARBY, THE STEAMROLLER RESTED
WELL! LET'S GET THAT STEAM ROLLER... AND THIS WRECK... OUT OF HERE!
YEAH! THE TOWNSFOLK'LL BE DRIVIN' THROUGH... SOON AS THE MAYOR CUTS THE TAPE!
THE MAYOR AIN'T GONNA CUT THE TAPE, JEB! G'MERE!

NO! THE MAYOR WON'T CUT ANY TAPE! NOR WILL THE REST OF THE COUNCIL BE PRESENT AT THE ROAD'S OPENING CEREMONY! FOR MAYOR APPLEGATE, MR. BARLOW, MR. WILLIAMS, AND MR. HORNSBY HAVE BEEN FLATTENED BY THE STEAMROLLER AND NEATLY INSET INTO THE ROAD'S FRESH NEW PAVEMENT...
GULP!
CHOKE!
GOOD LORD!


HEH, HEH! WELL, THE OCCUPANTS OF CRAGMOOR'S VIOLATED GRAVES CERTAINLY TOOK SOME CONCRETE STEPS TOWARD REVENGE, EH, KIDDIES? I HOPE THE END TO MY LITTLE TERROR-TALE DIDN'T FALL FLAT! AS FOR THOSE FOUR COUNCILMEN... WELL, I WOULDN'T FEEL SORRY FOR THEM IF I WERE YOU! AFTER ALL, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THEY'VE BEEN ON THE LEVEL IN YEARS! NOW, I'LL RETURN YOU TO THE VAULT-KEEPER! BYE! PLEASANT... SCREAMS?



The crowd was hushed and apprehensive as Jacques Carigot climbed the steps to the Guillotine The mob gathered on the cobblestones below leaned breathlessly forward, as if at a signal. slowly the condemned man turned and grinned down at them Slowly he winked, as if at an uproarious jest

"Even at his own execution," a fat man in a leather apron wheezed to his neighbor, "he is able to smile and maintain his reputation as *Jacques the Joker!*"

"He is laughing at *Paris* . . . at *US!*" his tall companion rasped. "These fools come to admire his brazen courage, completely ignoring the fact that 20 innocent people have died at his hands! The sooner the Guillotine blade cuts off his devilish head, the safer we'll all be!"

"He's a devil, all right!" the fat man agreed grudgingly "But such *wit!* Imagine . . . an original and highly humorous verse pinned to each of his victims! He may be the deadliest killer to ever walk the streets of France, but who can deny that he deserves to be called the *JOKER?*"

. . . . .

The Chief Jailer stood slightly below the platform, his eyes never leaving the face of the man who was about to die. *What kind of depraved maniac can he be?* he thought to himself. *Life . . . death . . . everything is a source of mirth to him! Even his last request was totally different from those I usually receive the eve of execution! A fine feast . . . a visit from a close friend . . . THOSE are invariably the last desire But not for Monsieur Carigot . . . HE asks for a bottle of purple ink and a pen! But I knew too much about his penchant for ironic humor not to see through his stunt He poisons himself by swallowing the ink or stabs himself with the pen and the Guillotine is cheated And he has made his last and most sensational joke!*

Despite the revulsion he felt over the man's ghoulish deeds, the Chief Jailer marveled at the eerie smile tugging at the corners of Carigot's mouth. *Even now he is probably waiting for the poison to take effect,* the jailer thought. *But his last joke will never be staged, because I had enough presence of mind to substitute a harmless vegetable dye for the ink and a rubber-nibbed point for the pen he wanted!*

. . . . .

The high scarf which the prisoner wore tightly wrapped around his throat deeply angered the Executioner *Even at this moment,* the officer thought, *this jester thinks perhaps he will escape by hiding inside the scarf some hard object which will blunt the blade when it falls A last big joke, he hopes!*

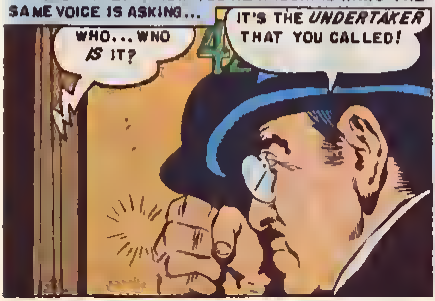
The Executioner forced Carigot to his knees, placed the man's head in the hollowed-out place directly below the poised blade far overhead. Then, suddenly, the officer yanked the scarf loose, exposing Monsieur Carigot's bare throat Nothing clattered to the platform, to the Executioner's dismay. His eyes widened and he stared in disbelief at his victim's neck A succession of crude dashes completely circled the condemned man's throat And, below the line of purple dots, were the carefully lettered words:

PLEASE CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE!
THANK YOU . . . THE JOKER!

THIS STORY DOESN'T QUITE MAKE IT! IT'S ONLY...

HALF-WAY HORRIBLE!

YOUR NAME IS *ZACHARY BOXER!* YOU'RE AN *UNDERTAKER!* YOU'RE STANDING BEFORE THE APARTMENT DOOR, CHECKING ITS NUMBER WITH THE PHONE CALL REQUEST YOU'D RECEIVED HALF AN HOUR AGO! THE VOICE ON THE OTHER END HAD SOUNDED SHAKY... TEARFUL! YOU'D KNOWN THAT IT'D MEANT ONLY ONE THING! *BUSINESS!* NOW YOU'RE KNOCKING ..AND THE SAME VOICE IS ASKING...



YOU SWING OPEN THE DOOR! THE LIGHT FROM THE HALLWAY KNIFES INTO THE PITCH-BLACK APARTMENT! YOU STEP INSIDE...HESITANTLY! A HEAVY ODOR OF INCENSE HANGS IN THE AIR...

I'M SORRY! I...I CAN'T *SEE* YOU!

I DON'T *WANT* YOU TO *SEE ME!* LISTEN TO MY *STORY! THEN*...IF YOU *STILL* WANT THE JOB...

THE LIGHT BEAMING IN FROM THE HALL ILLUMINATES A CHAIR! YOU SHUT THE DOOR...AND AS THE DARKNESS CLOSES IN, YOU STUMBLE TOWARD IT! YOU SIT DOWN AS THE NERVOUS VOICE CONTINUES...

I KNOW THIS IS OUT OF THE *ORDINARY*...BUT SO IS MY *NEED* FOR YOU! WILL YOU *BEAR WITH ME?*

PLEASE TELL ME WHAT YOU *WANT*, SIR! I'M VERY *BUSY* THESE DAYS!

THE SWEET, PUNGENT INCENSE ODOR *SICKENS* YOU! BUT NOW YOUR EYES ARE BECOMING ACCUSTOMED TO THE DARKNESS, ZACHARY BOXER! YOU CAN MAKE OUT THE FORM OF THE OWNER OF THE VOICE...LYING ON A DAYBED IN THE GLOOM...

LET ME BEGIN AT THE *BEGINNING*, MR. BOXER! I WILL *NOT* TELL YOU MY *NAME*, AS I'D RATHER NOT DISCLOSE MY *IDENTITY!* AFTER YOU *HEAR* MY STORY, YOU MAY *REFUSE* TO ACCEPT MY *OFFER*...

'IT BEGAN OVER TWO YEARS AGO! I'D BEEN HAVING HEADACHES...INDIGESTION...PERIODS OF ELATION AND DEPRESSION! I'D GONE TO SEE A DOCTOR I KNEW...'

WELL...YOU'VE EXAMINED ME, DOCTOR! CAN YOU TELL ME *WHAT'S WRONG?*

I'M *SORRY*, MR.—! I CAN FIND NOTHING *WRONG* WITH YOU...*PHYSICALLY!*

YOU EMPHASIZE THE WORD *PHYSICAL*, DOCTOR! DO YOU INFER...?

THERE ARE MANY DISTURBANCES THAT ARE NOT PHYSICAL IN NATURE, MR.—! THEIR CAUSE LIES WITH THE PATIENT'S *MENTAL* CONDITION!

ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT I'M...

I *SUGGEST*, MR.—, THAT YOU VISIT A *COMPETENT PSYCHIATRIST! HE* MAY BE ABLE TO *HELP* YOU!

YOU'RE UNCOMFORTABLE NOW, ZACHARY, AREN'T YOU? THE STRANGER LYING IN THE DARKNESS IS ADMITTING SOME *FRIGHTENING FACTS* ABOUT HIMSELF! YOU'D LIKE TO GET UP AND *LEAVE*, WOULDN'T YOU? BUT YOU'RE *AFRAID*...

AT FIRST I WAS INSULTED! BUT LATER ON, I *DID* SEE A PSYCHIATRIST...

'I SPENT MARY ROUNS WITN RIM, TELLING RIM ABOUT MYSELF! HE LISTENED...TAKIRG ROTES! ONE DAY, NE ANNOUNCED...'
MR —! ACCORDING TO ALL THE THIRGS YOU'VE TOLD ME, I AM FORCED TO COME TNE CONCLUSION TNAT YOU ANE SUFFERING FROM A MILO FORM OF DEMENTIA PRAECOX...ER... SCHIZOPHREHIA! YOUN PERIOOS OF ELATION AND OEPRESSION SIGRIFY A SPLIT-PERSONALITY!
IS... IS IT DAHGER-OUS, OOCTOR!
THERAPY OAR DO A GREAT DEAL FOR YOU, MR.—! YOU MUST PUT YOURSELF IN MY HANDS!
YES, DOCTOR!
'SO I BEGAN VISITIRG MY PSYCRI-ATRIST REGULARLY! BUT, MEAN-WHILE, THESE SPELLS I'D BEEN EXPERIENCING BEGAME MORE PRONOUNCED! I'D WAKE FROM SOUND SLEEPS WITR STRAMGE DESIRES..!'
GOT TO...GO OUT! GOT TO...HAVE FUN!
'DURING TRESE SPELLS, I'D VISIT PLACES I'D NEVEN'VE DREAMED OF GOING DURING MY NONMAL PERIODS...'
WHAT'S A BUY LIKE YOU DOIR' IR A PLACE LIKE THIS. RANDSOME? YOU LOOK LIKE A GENTLEMAN!
JUS' OUT FOR A GOOD TIME, BABY!
'AT FINST THERE WAS NO RARM IN WHAT I WAS DOIRG! BUT SOOR THE THRILLS I'D SEEK DURIRG THESE SPELLS BEGAME MORE PERVERSE..!'
THIS IS A STICK-UP, MISTER! PUT UP YOUR NANDS!
D...DON'T SNOOT! P-PLEASE!
'THE POINT IS...I DIDN'T NEED THE MONEY! I WAS WELL OFF, RAD A GOOD IHCOME! WHAT I WAS DOIHG WAS PURELY EVIL FOR EVIL'S SAKE! I WAS LIKE TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE! IR MY NORMAL PERIODS, I WAS MORAL, DECEHT, RESPECTABLE...'
YOU BUZZED, MR.—?
TAKE A LETTER, MISS JORES! TO A.C. SUNTON CO.! GENTLEMEN! AS OF...
'BUT IR THESE SPELLS, WHEN MY OTHER SIDE...MY EVIL SIDE...TOOK OVER, I WAS BLACK, DIRTY, THE WORST TYPE OF PERSON...'
PLEASE...SOB! PLEASE DON'T... SOB...HIT ME AGAIN! P-PLEASE...
NEXT TIME... GASP...I'LL KILL YOU!

'MEANWHILE, MY PSYCHIATRIST WAS DOING HIS BEST! I *TOLD* HIM ABOUT EACH OF THESE SORTIES INTO EVIL I'D EXPERIENCED...'

YOU MUST REFUSE TO *GIVE IN* TO THESE TIDAL WAVES THAT SWEEP OVER YOU!

I *CAN'T*, DOCTOR! I'VE *TRIED*.. BUT I *JUST CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF!*

'THINGS GOT WORSE! EACH TIME MY *OTHER* PERSONALITY TOOK OVER, I SANK LOWER AND LOWER! ONCE, I WOKE UP IN A FILTHY CELLER! I DIDN'T KNOW HOW I'D GOTTEN THERE... WHAT HAD HAPPENED! MY CLOTHES WERE TORN AND DIRTY, AND I SMELLED FROM ALCOHOL AND CHEAP PERFUME! MY HEAD FELT LIKE...'

OOOWWW! I'VE..GOT... A *LUMP* BACK THERE! I... I MUST HAVE BEEN *SLUGGED!* AND... AND MY *WALLET'S GONE!*

'THESE FITS OF EVIL GAME MORE AND MORE OFTEN AS TIME WENT ON! THEY EVEN BEGAN TO HAPPEN DURING THE DAY... IN THE OFFICE...'

WHAT *IS* IT, HELEN? WHAT *HAPPENED* IN THERE?

SOB...SOB! HE *BUZZED*.. SOB...FOR ME! I... I...SOB... SOB! HE...HE'S *HORRIBLE!* I... I NEVER WANT TO *SEE* HIM AGAIN!

'AND THEN IT HAPPENED! I'D GONE TO VISIT MY PSYCHIATRIST AT OUR USUAL APPOINTMENT TIME! NO ONE WAS IN THE WAITING ROOM WHEN I CAME IN! HE DIDN'T EVEN LOOK UP..!'

WELL...GOOD AFTERNOON, MR.—! COME IN! NOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

I.. I FEEL *FINE*, DOCTOR! JUST FINE!

'I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED! ALL I KNOW IS THE NEXT THING I CAN RECALL IS STANDING OVER HIS MUTILATED BODY.'

GOOD LORD!

'I RAN FROM HIS OFFICE FEELING LOATHSOME AND DISGUSTED WITH MYSELF! THIS TIME I'D GONE *TOO FAR!* I KNEW, IF THEY CAUGHT UP WITH ME, I'D END UP IN A MENTAL INSTITUTION..!'

GOT TO GET *OUT OF THE COUNTRY!*

'THAT NIGHT, I HOPPED A PLANE TO HAITI.'

I'LL *STAY* THERE TILL THIS THING *BLOWS OVER!*

'IT WAS WHILE I WAS IN HAITI THAT I LEARNED ABOUT VOODOO...'
SIMPLE, CHUM! THESE NATIVE DEVILS FASHION A DOLL IN THE FORM OF SOMEONE THEY HATE! THEY MAKE SOME MUMBO-JUMBO.. STICK A FEW PINS IN THE DOLL... AND POOF THE GUY THEY HATE IS DEAD!
INCREDIBLE!
'SO I WENT TO SEE AN OLD VOODOO WITCH DOCTOR 'I TRIED TO EXPLAIN WHAT I WANTED...'
HALF OF ME IS EVIL! HALF IS GOOD! I WANT YOU TO DESTROY THE EVIL HALF!
NO! NO CAN DO!
I'LL PAY! I'LL PAY ANYTHING YOU ASK! ANYTHING!
YOU PAY TWO HUNDRED DOLLAR?
ANYTHING! I'LL GIVE YOU FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!
I TRY! YOU SIT DOWN! YOU WAIT!
'THE OLD VOODOO NATIVE BEGAN TO MOULD A SMALL GROTESQUE DOLL FROM WADS OF CLAY HE'D FISH FROM A BOILING POT' THEN HE TOOK CUTTINGS FROM MY HAIR... CLIPPINGS FROM MY NAILS... BITS OF MY SKIN... AND IMBEDDED THEM IN MY IMAGE! HE HELD IT UP FOR ME TO SEE...'
THIS...YOU!
BY GEORGE, IT LOOKS LIKE ME!
'NEXT, THE OLD MAN TOOK SOME BLACK GOO FROM A POT AND PAINTED ONE HALF OF THE DOLL BLACK! THE OTHER HALF, HE PAINTED PURE WHITE...
BLACK IS EVIL! WHITE IS GOOD!
I...I SEE!
SUDDENLY THE OLD MAN PICKED UP A LONG NEEDLE AND JABBED IT INTO THE BLACK HALF OF THE VOODOO DOLL! HE GRINNED AT ME... AN IDIOTIC, TOOTHLESS GRIN...
FIVE HUNDRED DOLLAR, PLEASE! I DESTROY EVIL HALF!
5

YOU START FROM YOUR SEAT, ZACHARY BOXER! THE FORM ON THE DAYBED IS SITTING UP...
THAT'S MY STORY, MR. BOXER! NOW... YOU KNOW EVERYTHING!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, SIR! WHY DO YOU SEND FOR ME? I'M AN UNDERTAKER!
I KNOW, MR. BOXER!
YOU WATCH AS THE FIGURE IN THE GLOOM BEGINS TO UNTIE HIS DRESSING GOWN! YOU STRAIN YOUR EYES, TRYING TO MAKE OUT HIS FEATURES...
THAT IS WHY I SENT FOR YOU, MR. BOXER! THE OLD VOODOO CHIEF DID HIS JOB WELL!
HE... HE CURED YOU?
THE FIGURE BEFORE YOU DROPS HIS ROBE TO THE FLOOR! A STRANGE ODOR DRIFTS TOWARD YOU ...NOT THE ODOR OF INCENSE...
YES! HE CURED ME! HE KILLED THE EVIL HALF OF MY SPLIT-PERSONALITY! IT'S DEAD! KILLED IT FOR GOOD!
THAT... THAT SMELL!
YOU KNOW THAT ODOR! IT'S FAMILIAR TO YOU, ZACHARY! BUT YOU CAN'T PLACE IT! THE INCENSE SCENT POLLUTES IT...
BUT SOON AFTER, A STRANGE THING BEGAN TO HAPPEN, MR. BOXER! THAT'S WHY I SENT FOR YOU...
TURN ON THE LIGHT! THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH!
FOR A MOMENT, THE LIGHT BLINDS YOU! THEN YOU SEE HIM! HE STANDS BEFORE YOU CLOTHED ONLY IN SHORTS! AND HALF OF HIS BODY...
YES, MR. BOXER! HALF OF MY BODY IS DEAD, TOO! IT'S DECAYING! I CAN'T STAND THE SMELL! I SENT FOR YOU, BECAUSE I WANT YOU TO EMBALM IT!
GOOD LORD!
THE END
HEH, HEH! YEP! THAT'S MY STORY, DOLLS! POOR MR. BLAHK REALLY HAD A SPLIT-PERSONALITY... RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE OF HIM! THE OLD VOODOO CREEP TOOK HIM SERIOUS! AS FOR MR. BOXER, THAT'S THE FIRST HALF-WAY JOB HE EVER TACKLED! AS HE SNICKERS, 'HALF A CORPSE IS BETTER THAN NONE... IN MY RACKET!' OH... IF YOU WANT PHOTOS OF ME AND THE OTHER GHOULUNATICS, HEAD MY COLUMN! IT TELLS ALL ABOUT THAT RACKET! BYE NOW!

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

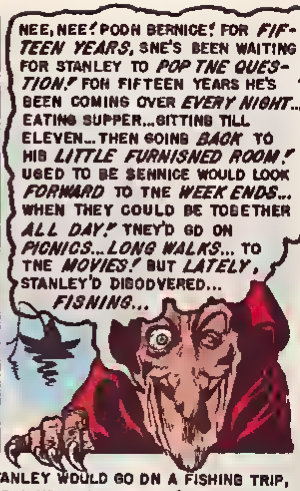
HEE, HEE! WELCOME TO *THE HAUNT OF FEAR*, KIDDIES! YEP... IT'S YOUR *CREEPS-COOKER-UPPER, THE OLD WITCH!* I'VE GOT THE FIRE UNDER MY *CAULDRON* LIT, AND ITS *EVIL BREW* IS *BUBBLING* AND *STEAMING!* COME ON IN! WE'LL HAVE A REGULAR OLD-FASHIONED *FISH-FRY!* YEP! MY STORY THIS TIME CONCERNS *FISH... POOR* FISH THAT *GET CAUGHT!* I *CALL* THIS *PORTION OF PUTRID PALPITATIONS DISHED FROM MY DISGUSTING DELVINGS INTO THE DELIRIOUS...*

HOOK, LINE, AND STINKER!

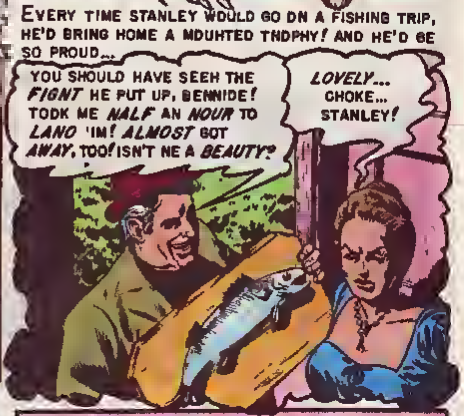
STANLEY TURNED FROM THE MOUNTED FISH AND STUDIED THE FACE OF THE FORTY-YEAR OLD WOMAN SEATED BEFORE HIM...
S'MATTER, BERNICE? YOU ANGRY 'BOUT SOMETHIN'?
NO, STANLEY! I...I...SOB... I'M NOT ANGRY!
STANLEY PATTED THE UNHAPPY WOMAN'S HEAVING SHOULDER...
AW, BERNICE! DON'T START THAT ALL OVER AGAIN!
BUT...SOB, I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS! FIFTEEN YEARS!
IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, BERNICE! YOU'LL SEE!
YOU...SAY THAT EVERY YEAR, STANLEY! I'M TIRED OF WAITING! WE'RE GETTING OLD!
BUT...I'M NOT READY TO GET MARRIED YET, BERNICE!
WHEN, STANLEY? WHEN WILL YOU BE READY? WE'VE BEEN KEEPING COMPANY FOR ALMOST FIFTEEN YEARS! YOU'RE AS READY AS YOU'LL EVER BE!
GIVE ME A FEW MORE MONTHS! THAT'S ALL I ASK!
WE LOVE EACH OTHER, STANLEY! I'M LONELY HERE IN THIS OLD HOUSE ALL BY MYSELF...
I COME TO SEE YOU EVERY DAY, DON'T I? I EAT SUPPER HERE! I COME OVER FOR BREAKFAST, TOO! WHAT MORE CAN I DO?
YOU CAN LIVE HERE! IF WE WERE MARRIED, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO GO HOME AT NIGHT!
NOME? OH, DEAR! THANK YOU FOR REMINDING ME! IT'S PAST ELEVEN! I MUST BE GOING! TOMORROW'S SATURDAY, YOU KNOW!
I...I KNOW! GOING ON A FISHING TRIP AGAIN, EH, STANLEY?

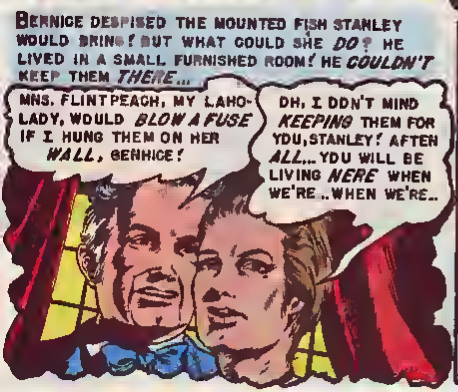
THAT'S RIGHT! I HOPE I CATCH A BIG ONE! GEE, IT'S NICE OF YOU TO TAKE CARE OF MY TROPHIES FOR ME, BERNICE!
THIS WILL BE YOUR HOME SOMEDAY! MIGHT AS WELL...

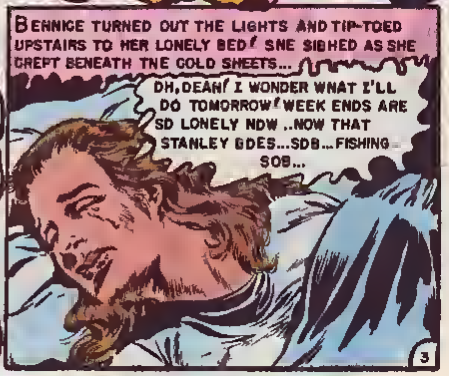
GOOD-NIGHT, BERNICE! SEE YOU MONDAY!
GOOD-NIGHT, STANLEY!


AWW, NEE! POOR BERNICE! FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, SHE'S BEEN WAITING FOR STANLEY TO POP THE QUESTION! FOR FIFTEEN YEARS HE'S BEEN COMING OVER EVERY NIGHT... EATING SUPPER...SITTING TILL ELEVEN...THEN GOING BACK TO HIS LITTLE FURNISHED ROOM! USED TO BE BERNICE WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO THE WEEK ENDS... WHEN THEY COULD BE TOGETHER ALL DAY! THEY'D GO ON PICNICS...LONG WALKS... TO THE MOVIES! BUT LATELY, STANLEY'D DISCOVERED... FISHING...

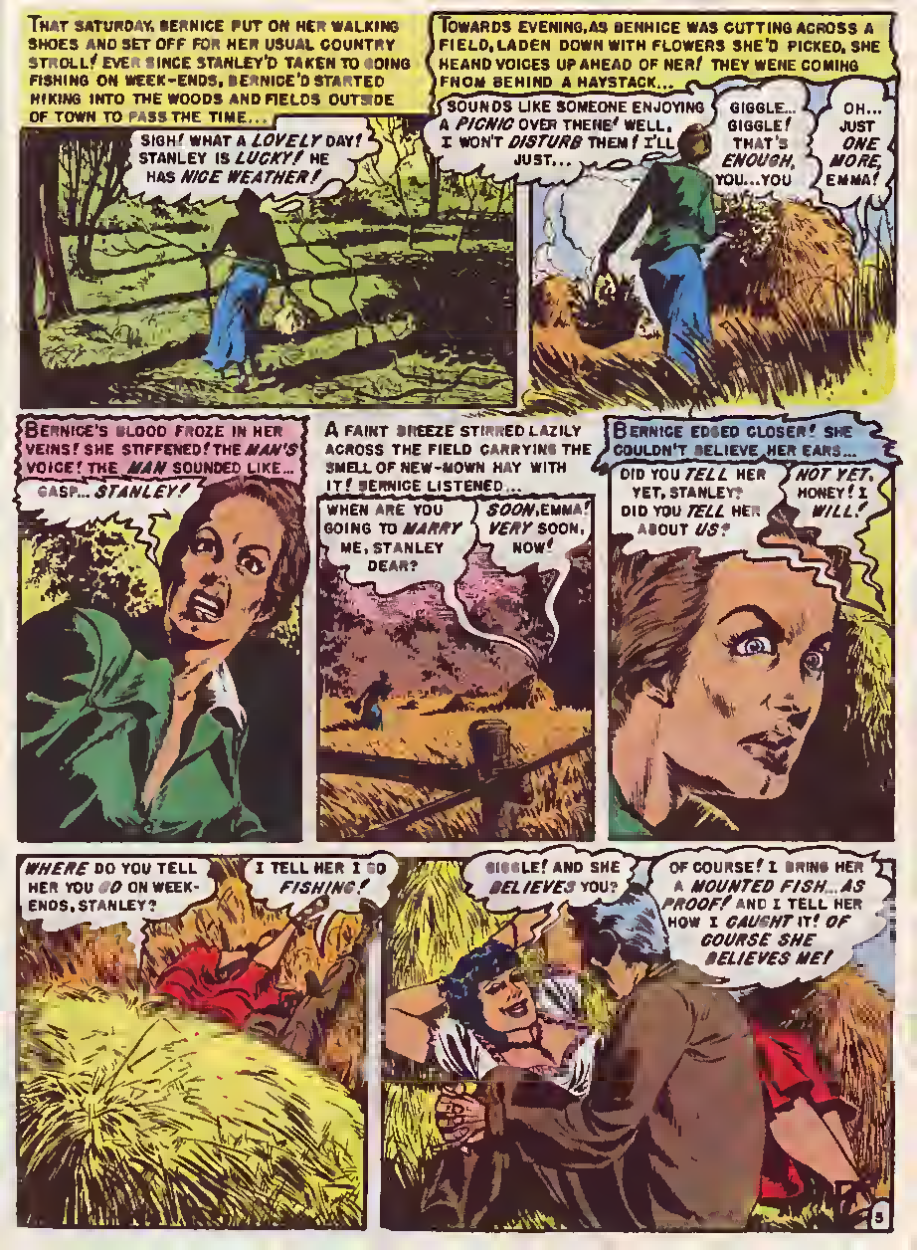
BERNICE CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND STANLEY AND LOCKED IT! THEN SHE TURNED TO THE PLAQUES HANGING AROUND THE LIVING-ROOM...PLAQUES WITH FISH MOUNTED UPON THEM...
I...I HATE YOU! EACH ONE OF YOU! I HATE YOU FOR TAKING HIM AWAY FROM ME!


EVERY TIME STANLEY WOULD GO ON A FISHING TRIP, HE'D BRING HOME A MOUNTED TROPHY! AND HE'D BE SO PROUD...
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE FIGHT HE PUT UP, BERNIDE! TOOK ME HALF AN HOUR TO LAND 'IM! ALMOST GOT AWAY, TOO! ISN'T HE A BEAUTY?
LOVELY... CHOKE... STANLEY!


BERNICE DESPISED THE MOUNTED FISH STANLEY WOULD BRING! BUT WHAT COULD SHE DO? HE LIVED IN A SMALL FURNISHED ROOM! HE COULDN'T KEEP THEM THERE...
MRS. FLINTPEACH, MY LAND-LADY, WOULD BLOW A FUSE IF I HUNG THEM ON HER WALL, BERNICE!
OH, I DON'T MIND KEEPING THEM FOR YOU, STANLEY! AFTER ALL... YOU WILL BE LIVING HERE WHEN WE'RE ..WHEN WE'RE...


BERNICE TURNED OUT THE LIGHTS AND TIP-TOED UPSTAIRS TO HER LONELY BED! SHE SIGHED AS SHE CREPT BENEATH THE COLD SHEETS...
OH, DEAR! I WONDER WHAT I'LL DO TOMORROW! WEEK ENDS ARE SO LONELY NOW ..NOW THAT STANLEY GOES...SOB...FISHING SOB...

THAT MONDAY MORNING...
GOOD MORNING, STANLEY!
MORNIN', BERNICE! THOUGHT I'D DROP IN FOR BREAKFAST!
COFFEE'S ALMOST READY! DID YOU... DID YOU HAVE ANY LUCK?
HUM? OH, YEAH! CAUGHT A BEAUTY! IT'S BEING MOUNTED. I'LL BRING IT OVER TONIGHT!
I COULD PICK IT UP FOR YOU, STANLEY!
OH—THAT'S ALL RIGHT, BERNICE! MMM! COFFEE'S GOOD THIS MORNING!
THAT NIGHT...
ISN'T IT A BEAUTY, BERNICE! BIGGEST PERCH I EVER LANDED!
IT.. IT'S LOVELY, DEAR! WHERE... WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO HANG IT? WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF ROOM!
HERE'S A SPOT!
STANLEY! HAVE YOU DECIDED ABOUT US? I MEAN... WHEN?
SOON, BERNICE!
I THOUGHT MAYBE THIS WEEK END WE COULD DRIVE UPSTATE AND STOP OFF AT A JUSTICE-OF-THE-PEACE! IT WOULD BE SO...
UH, UH! NOT THIS WEEK-END, BERNICE! I'M GOING FISHING AGAIN THIS WEEK-END!
OH... I SEE!


THAT SATURDAY, BERNICE PUT ON HER WALKING SHOES AND SET OFF FOR HER USUAL COUNTRY STROLL! EVER SINCE STANLEY'D TAKEN TO GOING FISHING ON WEEK-ENDS, BERNICE'D STARTED HIKING INTO THE WOODS AND FIELDS OUTSIDE OF TOWN TO PASS THE TIME...
SIGH! WHAT A LOVELY DAY! STANLEY IS LUCKY! HE HAS NICE WEATHER!
TOWARDS EVENING, AS BERNICE WAS CUTTING ACROSS A FIELD, LADEN DOWN WITH FLOWERS SHE'D PICKED, SHE HEARD VOICES UP AHEAD OF HER! THEY WERE COMING FROM BEHIND A HAYSTACK...
SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE ENJOYING A PICNIC OVER THERE! WELL, I WON'T DISTURB THEM! I'LL JUST...
GIGGLE... GIGGLE! THAT'S ENOUGH, YOU...YOU
OH... JUST ONE MORE, EMMA!
BERNICE'S BLOOD FROZE IN HER VEINS! SHE STIFFENED! THE MAN'S VOICE! THE MAN SOUNDED LIKE...
GASP... STANLEY!
A FAINT BREEZE STIRRED LAZILY ACROSS THE FIELD CARRYING THE SMELL OF NEW-MOWN HAY WITH IT! BERNICE LISTENED...
WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO MARRY ME, STANLEY DEAR?
SOON, EMMA! VERY SOON, NOW!
BERNICE EDGED CLOSER! SHE COULDN'T BELIEVE HER EARS...
DID YOU TELL HER YET, STANLEY? DID YOU TELL HER ABOUT US?
NOT YET, HONEY! I WILL!
WHERE DO YOU TELL HER YOU GO ON WEEK-ENDS, STANLEY?
I TELL HER I GO FISHING!
GIGGLE! AND SHE BELIEVES YOU?
OF COURSE! I BRING HER A MOUNTED FISH... AS PROOF! AND I TELL HER HOW I CAUGHT IT! OF COURSE SHE BELIEVES ME!
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BERNICE HAD TO COVER HER MOUTH TO KEEP FROM SCREAMING! SHE TURNED TO RUN AS...
BUT LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT HER, EMMA, DEAR! THE WEEK-END'S ALMOST HALF OVER! LET'S NOT WASTE ANY OF ITS PRECIOUS MOMENTS!
OH, STANLEY! YOU'RE SO SWEET...
BERNICE SCRAMBLED ACROSS THE FIELD AND THROUGH THE WOODS..
STANLEY... AND ANOTHER WOMAN! HE LIED TO ME! HE—HE TOLD ME HE WAS FISHING, AND ALL THE TIME HE WAS SEEING HER!
SHE ARRIVED HOME BRUISED AND TORN.. GASPING FOR BREATH...
WHAT WILL I DO? I'M LOSING HIM!
LOSING HIM!
BERNICE SPENT THE REST OF THE WEEK-END CRYING HER HEART OUT! SHE KEPT THINKING OF STANLEY... AND THAT WOMAN...
...AND... SOB... I... SUPPOSE... SOB.., HE'LL BRING ME... ANOTHER MOUNTED... FISH... TO... SOB... HANG... UP... WITH... SOB... THE REST... OF THEM...
AND BERNICE WAS RIGHT! ON MONDAY NIGHT..
GOOD EVENING, BERNICE! LOOK!
GOOD EVENING, STANLEY! COME... COME IN...
LOOK AT THIS ONE! ONE OF THE BOYS UP AT THE LAKE TOLD ME IT WAS THE BIGGEST RAINBOW HE'D EVER SEEN COME OUT OF THOSE WATERS...
WHAT LAKE, STANLEY?
LAKE CHIPPAWA, WHERE I ALWAYS GO! HAD THIS BABY GOIN' FOR ALMOST AN HOUR...
YOU'VE HAD ME GOING TOO, STANLEY! FOR A LONG TIME...

HUH? YOU SAY SOMETHIN', STANLEY!
I...I...NO, STANLEY!
OH, WELL! WHERE WAS I? OH, YEAH! ALMOST AN HOUR THIS RAINBOW FOUGHT...BUT I FINALLY LANDED HIM!
FIFTEEN YEARS YOU'VE BEEN FIGHTING ME!
NOW, HE'S MINE! ALL MINE! I...I... BERNICE!
NOW YOU'RE GOING TO BE MINE... STANLEY!
BERNICE! FOR GOD'S SAKE! PUT DOWN THAT KNIFE!
I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR 'FISHING' TRIPS, STANLEY... ALL ABOUT THAT EMMA..
...BUT SHE CAN'T HAVE YOU! YOU'RE MINE! I HOOKED YOU FIFTEEN YEARS AGO... AND I'M GOING TO LAND YOU!
BERNICE!
WHEN BERNICE'S MAID CAME THE NEXT MORNING, SHE FOUND THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN STANDING BEFORE A HUGE PLAQUE HANGING ABOVE THE FIRE-PLACE! THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT GLEAMED ON THE BLOOD-STAINED FIGURE MOUNTED UPON IT! BERNICE'S VOICE WAS SLIGHTLY HIGH-PITCHED AND SHAKY AS SHE CHUCKLED..
EEE, EEE! HE WAS A CLEVER LITTLE DEVIL! ALMOST GOT AWAY, TOO! BUT I LANDED HIM! EEE, EEE! GAVE ME A TOUGH FIGHT, THOUGH! EEE, EEE! FIFTEEN...EEE, EEE...YEARS...
HEE, HEE! YEP! POOR STANLEY WAS FINALLY CAUGHT! AS FOR BERNICE... WELL, THEY PUT HER AWAY IN A PADDED CELL! ALL DAY LONG SHE JUST SITS...AND SITS...AND SITS! BUT NOTHING BITES ON THE HAIR-PIN SHE DANGLES DOWN THE SINK DRAIN! I GUESS STANLEY WILL BE THE ONLY POOR FISH SHE EVER HOOKED! 'BYE, NOW! WE'LL ALL SEE YOU NEXT IN MY MAD-MAG, THE HAUNT OF FEAR!
THE END

THE VAULT KEEPER